

Remarks by Research!America Chair John Edward Porter  
Research!America Awards Dinner  
March 11, 2015

I know I say this every year, but all of us at Research ! America, our officers, our board, and our members are privileged to work with our President, Mary Woolley, and her exceptional staff in furthering our mission to educate and advocate for science research

Thank you Mary for your and our staff's ongoing leadership to make a difference for discovery and better health and a better life for all the American people.

Now, I have a sense-----in spite of all the excessive partisanship and posturing----that in this new Congress, there is a reborn sense of the importance of research to our country and its future.

When I go up to visit on the Hill, there seems to be a sense in the new majority party that they want to be perceived positively and that means not always being simply against.

What better national priority to be for and to support than scientific research?

It is the foundation for discovery that makes for healthier and happier Americans and helps to drive our economy forward and preserve our world-wide leadership in technology and innovation.

There are a number of indicators of this new awakening to science.

None, perhaps, is more prominent than the Fred Upton – Diana DeGette, Twenty First Century Cures initiative.

We honor Fred and Diana for that and their leadership of the House Energy and Commerce Committee tonight.

Perhaps it's the new Precision Medicine initiative, stronger commitment to Alzheimer's research, new efforts to address antibiotic resistance, and further commitment to the BRAIN initiative, all covered in the President's budget, that we trace directly to the work of our exceptional director of NIH, Francis Collins.

Perhaps it's the Cancer Genome Atlas that gives us so much hope

We are going to miss Harold Varmus at the helm of NCI, but we know he will continue his leadership in science and science policy.

Perhaps, it's our awakening to the dangers of and strong national commitment to keeping the Ebola virus in check----with special thanks to the leadership of Tony Fauci and Tom Frieden.

Perhaps, it's the new understanding of the role of regulatory science, where Peg Hamburg's leadership has shown through.

Bipartisan support continues for repealing the medical device tax and making the R & D tax credit permanent.

The difference is that this year a tax reform package including those provisions may be within reach.

Or maybe it's the states greater emphasis and support for science research, or the new 500,000 square foot science research building on the George Washington University campus where scientific research has not previously been a number one university priority.

And, back at the federal level, I am particularly heartened by the leadership of Tom Cole, new chair of the House Labor, H appropriations subcommittee, whom I find open to supporting research and pragmatic and engaged in the job of governing.

There are many more positive signs that haven't been evident in the past that give us hope for a new day for scientific research.

But a stronger awareness of the role of science and its importance to our future will not happen unless we all hit the Hill as never before with the strong help and support of leaders in the states and congressional districts back home.

How do we get local leaders and the American public to weigh in with their senators and representatives?

We educate and motivate and inspire them through the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission authorized and initially funded in this year's Cromnibus.

Through the good work and intervention of one of our great champions, Senator Tom Harkin, a provision in the final Appropriations Conference Report in the section on the Office of the Director of NIH, directs Dr. Collins, working together with Dr. France Cordova, Director of NSF, and with the Department of Education to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences, to set up and administer a Blue Ribbon Commission on Scientific Standing.

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This is not a one year initiative, but one that will last two or three years or more.

As it was conceived, it will set up a commission of 16 or 18 or 20 members who will work with NAS to accomplish the work

Members would be drawn not from science but from areas of society that, perhaps, don't hear enough or anything about the importance of science and research to our country's future.

The decision would be NAS's, but we have suggested these categories for consideration

(1) Communications (2) Faith community (3) Media (4) Celebrity  
(5) Venture capitalist

(6) Military (7) Young invincibles (8) Energy industry (9) Engineering  
(10) Manufacturing

(11) Education (12) Multicultural (13) Banking/Finance (14) Law  
(15) Sports (16) Economics

These leaders will help identify local leaders in their fields throughout the country who will convene discussions and gatherings at the local level to talk about the contributions of science.

Members of the public would be invited and asked to participate.

The idea is to get a variety of fields and leaders from those fields educated and inspired by what scientific research means to our country.

Media for these local events can amplify the message to the American public and engage them to be more proactive as well to push policymakers to raise science to a higher national priority.

Research ! America and its partners will work on a parallel track to do the research necessary to use the right messages and words (yes, words matter) to reach out to the American people with the broader message.

This parallel effort will be entirely privately funded and can use your organization's help in making it a reality and making it work.

This is an exciting time for making a difference for the things all of us believe in.

We look forward to working with you to make it happen

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Thanks for listening to me.